

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BULLETIN

April 1999

An occasional publication of the Field Operations Branch,
HIV/STD Health Resources Division, Texas Department of Health

HIV reporting by name began in Texas on January 1, 1999. We hope that the content of this bulletin will give answers to any questions you may have and help to address any concerns of counselors and clients.

How does HIV reporting by name work?

- Both laboratories and providers must report confirmed HIV infections with test dates that fall on or after January 1, 1999. Texas Department of Health (TDH) does **not** accept HIV case reports unless the date on the HIV test falls on or after January 1, 1999.
- Only people who test positive with **confidential** HIV tests will be reported using names.
- Names of people who test positive with **anonymous** HIV tests will **not** be reported. TDH will use information from PC/PE scannable forms to monitor the number of positive anonymous HIV tests for evaluation purposes only. Names of people who test negative should **not** be reported.
- To find out how to report an HIV infection in your area, call **1-800-705-8868** to be connected with the HIV reporting authority in your area. Your HIV Regional Coordinator can also point you in the right direction.
- After you make the initial report of an HIV infection, you will be contacted by local public health workers to complete a case report.
- Public health workers will also discuss with you whether or not this client requires further assistance from the public health system. Specially trained Disease Intervention Specialists can work with you to make sure that the infected individual:
 - knows his/her test results
 - has been given referral to care and services
 - has been offered help in notifying his/her partners that they may have been exposed to HIV.
- The case information will be sent to TDH in Austin. HIV reports will be merged into the system currently used to report AIDS cases and pediatric HIV infections. (**Please note:** the names of Texas AIDS patients have been reported since 1983 with no breaches of confidentiality in the surveillance system).
- TDH will remove identifying information, then send the case information to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta.

Is anonymous testing for HIV still available?

- Anonymous testing provides a way to test for HIV without giving a name. TDH is dedicated to making anonymous HIV testing accessible to people in all areas of Texas.
- All HIV testing sites that get funds from TDH must offer anonymous HIV testing **on site**.
- By Texas law, all STD clinics and other public health clinics must offer anonymous testing or give referrals to sites that do.
- The names of those who test positive with anonymous tests will not be reported. Positive anonymous test results will not be included in the official case counts of HIV infections.
- Most HIV service providers require a confidential positive test result - one with the client's real name - before they will provide services.

Will HIV reporting by name be retroactive?

- No! To be accepted by TDH, a case report must have a test date that falls on or after January 1 1999.
- People whose last positive test falls before that date will not be reported to TDH unless they develop AIDS.

What if a person does not want to use his/her real name to test for HIV?

- People who do not want to have their real names placed on their HIV tests can choose to be tested anonymously.
- Anonymous testing is available through all HIV testing sites contracting with Texas Department of Health.

How is the confidentiality and security of HIV reporting information safeguarded?

- In order to protect the security of HIV and AIDS case reports and surveillance data bases, the Bureau of HIV and STD Prevention takes specific proactive security measures outlined below. The TDH requires similar levels of security at regional TDH offices and at surveillance contractor sites, which are primarily local health departments.
- Surveillance information is **not** public information. Surveillance information is confidential. Lists of name are not released to the media, the public, insurance companies, law enforcement agencies, immigration agencies, or any other state or federal agencies.

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- All paper copies of data collection forms containing potentially identifying information are maintained in a locked file cabinet on a locked file room.
- All diskettes received from surveillance sites are password protected. Diskettes provided by sites are either permanently erased or returned after being loaded and verified as erased.
- Access to the surveillance databases are limited to the fewest numbers of staff possible and only those employees that have an express need to use the surveillance databases to do their job have access.
- Surveillance databases are on “stand alone” systems that cannot be accessed through the Internet or via modem lines. Surveillance databases are maintained on workstations and computer networks which cannot be accessed by individuals outside the surveillance unit.
- Offices which house surveillance data have physically restricted access.
- Telephone conversations in which staff must use or discuss patient identifiers or other confidential information are made in secure areas.
- All paper copies or computer discs which must be hand carried are kept in a locking briefcase. The briefcase must remain with surveillance staff until it can be secured in a locking cabinet and secure environment.
- Any state or local presentation of data, oral or written, include only aggregate data with no identifiers.
- All surveillance employees are required to read and sign a ***Statement of Confidentiality*** stating that they have read and understand the provisions of the Texas Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Act and the penalties, including dismissal, for any violation of confidentiality.